

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 INR-10 L-03  
ACDA-12 NSAE-00 PA-01 SS-15 SP-02 USIA-06 TRSE-00  
DODE-00 NSC-05 AID-05 EB-08 /095 W  
-----061972 102336Z /66

R 102214Z MAR 78

FM USMISSION USNATO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9942  
AMEMBASSY VALLETTA  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY ROME  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 02549

E.O.11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: NATO, AFSP

SUBJECT: MALTESE PARLIAMENTARIAN'S CALL ON AMBASSADOR  
BENNETT

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REFS: (A) VALLETTA 478, (B) STATE 60099 (BOTH REFS NOTAL)

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1. SUMMARY: DR. MARIO FELICE, MP IN MALTESE OPPOSITION  
NATIONALIST PARTY, CALLED ON AMBASSADOR BENNETT MARCH 9  
ON WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS UNOFFICIAL PRIVATE VISIT UNDER-  
TAKEN WITH KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORIZATION OF MINTOFF. FELICE  
URGED THAT US PLAY A ROLE IN ASSISTING MALTA ECONOMICALLY  
AFTER BRITISH DEPARTURE IN 1979. AMBASSADOR INDICATED  
THAT US SUPPORTED MALTESE DISCUSSIONS WITH FRENCH,  
ITALIANS AND GERMANS ON ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND HOPED  
THEY WOULD HAVE FAVORABLE OUTCOME, BUT INDICATED THAT US  
HAS NO PLANS TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH ASSISTANCE. HE TOLD  
FELICE THAT CONVERSATION WOULD BE FULLY REPORTED TO  
WASHINGTON AND VALLETTA. END SUMMARY.

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2. FELICE SAID THAT FOUR MONTHS AGO MINTOFF HAD ASKED  
FELICE TO BECOME MALTESE AMBASSADOR TO UNITED STATES IN  
ORDER TO ESTABLISH A US-MALTA DIALOGUE. FELICE, BECAUSE  
OF BUSINESS AND PERSONAL REASONS (HE CLAIMS TO BE AN  
INTERNATIONAL LAWYER WHO SPENDS MOST OF HIS TIME OUTSIDE  
MALTA.), WAS UNABLE TO ACCEPT. HOWEVER, MINTOFF'S DESIRE

TO ESTABLISH THE DIALOGUE REMAINS AND FELICE HAD THUS UNDERTAKEN THIS UNOFFICIAL, PRIVATE MISSION WITH KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORIZATION OF MINTOFF. (FELICE SAID HE HAD NO INTENTION OF BYPASSING AMBASSADOR LAINGEN AND INDICATED HE WOULD BE IN CONTACT WITH HIM UPON RETURN TO MALTA.)

3. FELICE EMPHASIZED THAT MINTOFF HAD RECENTLY SPLIT WITH LIBYA'S QADHAFI BECAUSE LATTER REJECTED ANY COMPROMISE ON MEDIAN LINE IN SEA BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES AND REFUSED TO SUBMIT ISSUE TO ICJ. MINTOFF ACCORDINGLY IS NO LONGER BUYING OIL FROM LIBYA, WHICH EXACERBATES MALTESE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES. FELICE SAID THAT ALGERIA IS MOVING TO FILL THIS VOID, AND REPORTED APPROACHES FROM BOUMEDIENNE TO MINTOFF. HE DISMISSED TUNISIA AS A FACTOR, PREDICTING THAT IT WOULD BE "ABSORBED" BY LIBYA BEFORE TOO LONG AND REGRETTED THAT MALTA'S CLOSEST NEIGHBORS ARE THE TWO MOST RADICAL AND DANGEROUS COUNTRIES IN THE REGION.

4. FELICE SAID THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO PLEAD MINTOFF'S CASE BUT WAS TALKING AS A MALTESE PATRIOT. THE COUNTRY'S FATE HANGS IN THE BALANCE AND TIME IS RUNNING OUT. THE MALTESE ECONOMY IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. THE BRITISH ARE LEAVING DEFINITELY AND THE ENERGY CRISIS AND OTHER FACTORS HAVE HURT THE MALTESE ECONOMY MORE THAN MINTOFF HAD ANTICIPATED. ALTHOUGH THE ECONOMY IS ULTIMATELY SELF-CONFIDENTIAL

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SUSTAINING THROUGH INCREASING TOURISM AND OTHER FACTORS, OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS MALTA MUST HAVE EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE.

5. FELICE SAID THAT DISCUSSIONS WITH EUROPEAN ALLIES ON ASSISTANCE ARE NOT GOING WELL. FRENCH HAVE TOO MANY PROBLEMS OF THEIR OWN. ITALY WANTS TO HELP, BUT DOESN'T HAVE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES, AND THE GERMANS HAVE NOT BEEN SPECIFIC ON EITHER TIMING OR AMOUNT OF HELP THEY HAD INDICATED THEY WOULD GIVE. ACCORDINGLY, MINTOFF'S POSITION IS BECOMING DESPERATE AND HIS REMAINING OPTIONS ARE FEW AND INCREASINGLY UNDESIRABLE. THE NEXT YEAR WILL BE DECISIVE. MALTA IS BASICALLY AND HISTORICALLY PRO-WESTERN AND WANTS TO REMAIN SO, BUT SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO RESOLVE HER ECONOMIC DILEMMA OR THIS WESTERN ORIENTATION MAY HAVE TO CHANGE.

6. FELICE ASKED IF US DECISION NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN MALTESE PROBLEMS WAS IRREVOCABLE. HE URGED THAT THE UNITED STATES BECOME INVOLVED IN ASSISTING MALTA, IF NECESSARY INDIRECTLY THROUGH OTHER NATO ALLIES. HE STRESSED MALTA'S STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE, REITERATED MINTOFF'S DESIRE FOR A DIALOGUE, AND ASKED AGAIN IF US COULD NOT

PLAY A PART.

7. AMBASSADOR BENNETT THANKED FELICE FOR HIS FRANKNESS. US HAS FOLLOWED DISCUSSION WITH FRENCH, ITALIANS AND GERMANS AND HOPES THEY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN ARRANGING ASSISTANCE FOR MALTA. US IS SYMPATHETIC BUT HAS NO PLANS TO PARTICIPATE. AMBASSADOR ASSURED FELICE HE WOULD SEND A FULL REPORT OF THE CONVERSATION TO WASHINGTON AND VALLETTA. COMMENT: WE FOUND JUDGEMENT IN REF A THAT FELICE IS A SELF-PROMOTER BORNE OUT IN THIS CONVERSATION. THERE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 USNATO 02549

WAS A HINT OF BLACKMAIL IN HIS APPROACH, ALTHOUGH HE IS NO DOUBT SINCERE IN HIS CONCERN OVER MALTA'S FUTURE. WE DEFER TO EMBASSY VALLETTA AS TO WHETHER FELICE WAS TALKING ON MINTOFF'S BEHALF, OR MERELY ON HIS OWN. END COMMENT. BENNETT

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## Message Attributes

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